Writing Measurable Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Objectives

Effective, useful evaluation begins with solid, measurable objectives. Carefully defining your objectives up front can make your work easier in the long run. Not only will the establishment of objectives help focus the development of your program, but they will also provide a timeline as well as a basis for later assessment of program effectiveness.

Process –vs- Outcome Objectives:

Process objectives have to do with implementing your program. They reflect procedures, purchasing, training, and other program implementation elements.

What   Exactly what procedure will be completed?

Who   Who is the person or group responsible for ensuring that this happens?

How much/   What quantity of this service or procedure, generally expressed as a percentage,
how Many   will take place?

When   What is the deadline by which this will have happened?

Example of process objective: By June, 2005, at least 50 High School students will complete all 10 sessions of the district's smoking cessation program.

Outcome objectives should describe exactly how you expect the child, population, or group to look after participating in your program. Always refer to changes you want to see in your data (rates, amounts and ages). Outcome objectives can measure a variety of factors, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors and protective factors. Below are specific examples of each.

Examples of Outcome Objectives:

Knowledge/skills: By June 30, 2005, 80% of students completing the Project Northland curriculum will increase their knowledge of the risks associated with alcohol by 30% as measured by pre-post tests.

Behavior: By June 30, 2005, as a result of implementing a Middle School Peer Mediation Program, the number of office referrals for violence/disruptive behavior will decrease by a 20% as measured by office records from the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years.

Assets/Protective Factors: By May 2006, as a result of the teacher mentoring program, the number of Middle School youth who report feeling connected to school will increase by 20% as measured by comparison of the WINSS student climate survey results from fall 2004 to spring of 2006.

Perceptions/Attitudes: As a result of implementing a comprehensive anti-tobacco program, the perceptions of the High School students around the dangers of smoking tobacco will increase by 20% as measured by comparison of the online Youth Risk Behavior Survey from September, 2004 to May, 2005.

Elements of an Outcome Objective
Key elements of an objective can best be identified by answering the following question: *"Who will do how much of what by when."*

> [Behavior/Attitude] among [Population]
>
> will [Percent Change] by [When as Measured by].

Characteristics of a Well Written Objective: SMART

Another rule of thumb for writing good objectives is to see if they are **SMART.** Once your draft an objective, check it against the following criteria to see how it stands up.

S=Specific. Objectives should be specific and use only one action verb. Objectives with more than one verb are difficult to measure. Also, avoid verbs that may have vague meanings to describe intended outcomes (e.g., "understand" or "know") because they are too hard to measure. Instead, use verbs that allow you to document action (e.g., "At the end of the session, the students will list three concerns…") **Remember, the greater the specificity, the greater the measurability.**

M=Measurable. It is impossible to determine whether or not you met your objectives unless you can measure them. A benchmark from which to measure change can help. For example, if you found in your evaluation that 70% of high school students believe that their age protects them alcoholism, you might write an objective that strives to decrease that percentage with faulty beliefs to 50%. Thus you will have an objective with a benchmark from which to measure change and one which is specific enough to be evaluated quantitatively.

A=Appropriate. Your objective must be appropriate (e.g., culturally, developmentally, socially, linguistically) for your target population. To insure appropriateness, objectives should originate from the needs of your target audience and not from a preconceived agenda of program planners. Conducting a solid needs assessment (e.g. holding in-depth interviews with members of the target population) helps to ensure that your objectives will be appropriate. For example, an objective focusing on risk factors for an elementary school population may be inappropriate for a high school population.

R= Realistic. Objectives must be realistic. Countless factors influence human behavior. If program planners set their sights too high on achieving changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills or behavior change, they will likely fall short of reaching their objectives. While a program may have been very successful, it may not appear that way on the surface because the objectives were too ambitious. The following is an unrealistic ATODA objective:

- *After participating in the CLASS ACTION curriculum, 100% of high school students will list all of the possible ways a lawyer will present information to prove guilt in a drug related trial.*

A more realistic objective could be written as follows:

- *After participating in the CLASS ACTION curriculum 80% of high school students will list at least two ways a lawyer might present information to prove guilt.*(Answer is proving responsibility, proving failure to act responsibility caused damages, and prove guilt through expert testimony.)

T=Time specific. It is important to provide a time frame indicating when the objective will be measured or a time by which the objective will be met. Including a time frame in your objectives helps in both the planning and the evaluation of a program.